Nourishing Life (2014)

New year, new text on vital nourishment (yang sheng) Blog Entry,

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"A light will come and it is brighter than you imagine"

– Dennis Leri

Vital Nourishment is a life-art practice. A home arts practice, an arts world practice. The term VN is a text source (Francois Jullien), art-life approach, and an encompassing strategy.

Yang sheng is a Chinese expression which is translated as vital nourishment, or “nourishing life.” Yang Sheng was exhaustively researched by possibly the world’s first anarchist, Zhaungzhi (contemporary to Aristotle). Through deepening my understanding of this term’s meanings and connotation, I am further achieving what I seek to create as a model for my artistic work and research practice.

How can art feed the whole of a life? How can one’s vocation feed the art, feed the life, the intellect, the personal practice, friendship, kinship, the

body-person, the inquiry, in community, in mutualism? What does it mean to let the intention be coherence, that the various parts of living all feed the whole? As stated by Sabine Williams: “in balance with the macrocosm for the benefit of the individual body, the body of the family, the body politic, and the body of the cosmos”

In the end of 2012, I made an Arts Manifesto, which was a source for future practice. Soon thereafter, I began to engage in a wildly healing process of fertility. Self research; experiential and embodied research. There is a book to write here.

In 2013, I deepened the enquiry through a performance poetry project on Yang Sheng. In a piece called “Pure Process”, I used spontaneous movement and stillness as an embodied basis to examine a constellation of phenomena that would offer a view on Nourishing Life.

This was my contribution to Eleni Stecopoulos' Poetics of Healing Symposium. Through the project, I found the revelation of relation between nourishing one's body and nourishing one's self.

Though the presentation wasn't personally a success, like any part of a conscious and nested procedure, the process nourished the research through what was learned, and what arises out from it. In the piece, we rearranged some elements of the space. In reflection of the night, I found the importance of anchoring oneself in the environment as a practice for performance, to nourish the self that will then present, but that is another story which leads into one of the bases for the project which was its counterpoint, Relay.

An area of research to nourish these ideas: The Chinese term for body, shenti, is more aptly

translated as “body-person,” no big divide, rather the concept of the materiality is in inextricable connection with the being. The vessel is a part of the environment, and this is expressed through processes such as the interactivity of the yin magnetism of the earth and the yang electro expansion of the forces of the sky; the Three Treasures (jing/essence/earth, qi/life breath/human, and shen/heart-mind/heaven); and jie qi, or the seasonal, procession of qi. The phenomenon of polarity indeed exists, and a mind and body split arises in Chinese energetics through an imbalance of larger forces of self in context. For example, one might be in a state of blood deficiency, which effects essence and energy, and requires nourishing to again harmonize the system as a whole, for the shen to sink into the blood at night and allow for the nourishment of rest and sleep. In other words, there is a process of nourishment required for the vessel to be in accordance with a harmonized procession of life, in order for the yin/yang to alchemize properly, and reestablish the balance.

Although indeed a different worldview than Western models, this division has resonance with the Cartesian mind-body split, the inheritance that dissolves as we access new realms, and our necessary unity (a term so beautifully coined by Gregory Bateson). The kinds of things that emerge in the contemporary life. Hence, back again into the practice of nourishing life. We can draw from the power of lineage and tradition in relation to a currency, flow, and intermix in a contemporary, multivaried existence.

All of the processes mentioned here require a kind of time and space, breath, subtlety — basic material for composing.

“Your life has a limit, knowledge has none

If you use the limited to pursue the limitless

You will be in danger of exhaustion”

-Zuangzhi

Searching for the more fluid (therefore less reified) action-process in all realms in VN. How to induce subtlety of breathing, harmony, and feeding to be coherently integrated into philosophical reflection and daily activities? And thereby feed the quintessence in myself …

Vital Nourishment includes not solely a personal perspective, but the unity of mental, ecological, social, aesthetic, and personal choices.